

# Making the Connection

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*Ballet classes enhance skating technique in many ways*

**F**or years skating coaches have been encouraging their skaters to take ballet classes to aid in on-ice performance. And for years, parents and coaches have heard their skaters ask, "What has ballet got to do with skating?"

A fair question to be sure.

Though skating and ballet experts agree that studying ballet will enhance a skater's on-ice technique, it isn't always so obvious how this will happen. What is it specifically that is taught and practiced in ballet that relates to the elements on the ice?

## posture and power

Skaters require strong core muscles to connect the upper and lower body for controlled, powerful movements. They must be able to keep their shoulders over their hips throughout jumps, spins, footwork and edges and be able to check their shoulders against their hips in mohawks, three-turns, brackets, rockers, counters and choctaws. Thus it is to the skater's benefit to become aware of the feeling of twisting in the middle of the torso, and also the feeling of staying square.

Ballet teachers spend hours teaching students correct ballet posture, which is the same posture needed for skating – a neutral spine with the shoulders over the hips. The ballet student is taught to engage the lower abdominal muscles while maintaining a neutral spine, thus learning to connect the upper and lower body for strong, powerful movements.

## balance and body lines

Maintaining a neutral spine is essential to both ballet technique and to performing on-ice elements. Ballet teaches the skater how to move the pelvis without losing balance or disconnecting the center in footwork sequences, including

pirouette turns, jumps and leaps across the floor. With every movement, in either skating or ballet, there is a weight shift from one foot to the other, which causes a constant change in the center of balance.

Having a good sense of balance and a strong core is critical to a skater's alignment and directly affects the skater's edge quality, footwork, jump preparation, landings and spins.

Correct placement, power and quickness are addressed in ballet classes through basic skills such as pliés, tendus, degages, frappe, fouette and grand battement. These movements teach the basic "snap through the hips, knees, ankles and feet" used for skating basics, such as power for stroking, pushing through the feet for jumps, and, of course, agility in quick footwork.

As the skater progresses in dance and skating, both disciplines focus on details of the basics – extension of body lines, flexibility while maintaining body alignment, quality of movement, and development of strength and confidence.

The skater learns to perform to different music rhythms and tempos, to count the beats of the music and how style and carriage change with the mood or theme of the music, thus establishing a dynamic range in presentation.

## expression and emotion

While ballet is often thought of by skaters as one more thing to do, it is the ballet that teaches the skaters how to perform. Ballet can teach a skater how to interpret and express their music by telling a story or conveying an emotion through the connecting steps of their program. This is what makes the difference between a program that is

all jumps with a lot of crossovers or stroking between the jumps, and a program that is interesting and artistic. When you look at the photos on the facing page, you will see just how similar ballet and skating are to one another.

*Jacqueline Boucard received her B.F.A. in dance from the University of Utah. She danced for seven seasons with the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble. She has worked with skaters both on and off the ice, including creating choreography for Zuzanna Szwed and Yuka Sato.*

*Anne Marine graduated magna cum laude with her B.F.A. in dance from Western Michigan University. She danced professionally for the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble (EDE) for 10 years, and now serves as the director of operations for EDE. Marine has taught at Oakland University, the EDE Center for Dance, and the Detroit Skating Club for more than 10 years.*

*Debbie Pitsos has been the off-ice coordinator for the Detroit Skating Club for 15 years. She has a liberal arts degree with a concentration in exercise science. Pitsos has served 10 years on the U.S. Figure Skating Sports Science Council, and as a faculty member for Sports Medicine/Science Camps. Pitsos is a rated professional ice dancing coach through the PSA.*

*Jerod Swallow is a five-time U.S. ice dance champion and was a senior U.S. competitor in pairs. He is also a five-time World and two-time Olympic team member. Swallow served on the U.S. Figure Skating Board and various committees as an athlete representative for 16 years. He is the new ice dance coordinator for the Detroit Skating Club, and is the figure skating representative for the United States Olympic Committee Athlete Advisory Council.*

# Corresponding Moves

The following photos show examples of several ballet moves or positions and their skating counterparts:



**Ballet  
second position**



**Skating  
spread eagle**



**Ballet  
fifth position**



**Skating  
choctaw**



**Ballet  
plie to tendu**



**Skating  
prepare to stroke**



**Ballet  
degage**



**Skating  
stroking**



**Ballet  
second  
arabesque**



**Skating  
spiral**

BALLET, SKATING CHOCTAW, SKATING PREPARE TO STROKE PHOTOS: DEBBIE PITISOS; SKATING SPREAD EAGLE, STROKING, SPIRAL: STAFF; SPECIAL THANKS TO SKATER, ASHLEY HOMEN

